

## ***Language in Higher Education Bill will Prevent***

## ***Criminal Use of Fake Academic Degrees***

**Washington, D.C.** – On Thursday, the U.S. House of Representatives [voted 354 to 58](#) to pass the *College Opportunity and Affordability Act* ([H.R. 4137](#)), a major higher education reauthorization bill which includes language championed by Congresswoman Betty McCollum (D-MN) to crack down on phony universities that sell fraudulent degrees.

Since the rise of the Internet, “diploma mills” have become a widespread problem, threatening not only the integrity of legitimate academic degrees but the health and security of Americans. Scam artists have created vast networks of fraudulent institutions and accreditation organizations to sell official-looking diplomas, and thousands of individuals have purchased these degrees to gain undeserved jobs or promotions, pose as doctors and treat patients, or illegally acquire U.S. immigration documents.

Rep. McCollum's provisions will work to prevent the sale of fake degrees by creating clear standards for recognizing legitimate academic institutions and giving law enforcement officials the information to identify and prosecute diploma mills.

"This legislation is an important first step toward ensuring that every college degree reflects the high quality of our higher education system," McCollum said today. "Fake diplomas undermine that quality, and they have been used to carry out deceptions and crimes that are absolutely repugnant."

Title VIII, Part H of the *College Opportunity and Affordability Act* will:

- instruct the Department of Education to create a list of accredited institutions and valid accreditation associations for immigration and Federal employment and hiring purposes,
- form a task force of higher education and law enforcement experts to develop a "strategic diploma integrity protection plan,"
- encourage states to take similar steps, and
- empower the Federal Trade Commission to crack down on diploma mills.

A Senate companion to H.R. 4137 was passed last year, and a conference

committee to reconcile the two versions is expected soon. Though the Senate bill did not include diploma mills provisions, the House language will likely be included in the final bill unless strong objections are raised.

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